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ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

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COMPTROLLER MYCHAJLIW TEAMS UP WITH COPS TO CRACK DOWN ON ILLEGAL PARKING IN HANDICAPPED SPOTS

Law enforcement to increase efforts to ticket drivers that park illegally in handicapped spaces following revenue report from Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw

(ERIE COUNTY, NY) – On the heels of a report from Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw that shows surcharges for parking illegally in handicapped spots are up 36 percent for the first quarter of 2018 compared to the first quarter of 2017, law enforcement is teaming up with Comptroller Mychajliw to crack down on able bodied people that break the law by parking in spaces designated for individuals living with disabilities.

Comptroller Mychajliw was joined by Erie County Sheriff’s Office - Police Services Division Chief Scott Joslyn, Town of Orchard Park Supervisor Patrick Keem and Orchard Park Police Chief Mark F. Pacholec to raise awareness about illegal use of handicapped parking spots after his report showed violations have increased 36 percent in the past year.

The delegation of local elected leaders and law enforcement gathered to get the message out at Orchard Park Town Hall on June 13th. They condemned those that illegally park in designated handicapped parking spots, and spoke about the hardships faced by those that are forced to park further away when those spots are illegally taken.

“There’s a special place in hell for healthy people that are too lazy, stupid, heartless, or a combination of them all, that illegally park in handicapped spots. My office just completed a report that shows that handicapped parking violations are on the rise. No able bodied person should park in handicapped parking spots. Period. This is a selfish, disgraceful act. The message is simple: if you do not have authority to park in a handicapped parking spot, do not park there,” said Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw.

Following the release of the report from Comptroller Mychajliw, Erie County Sheriff Timothy Howard announced plans for his office to increase patrols of handicapped parking spaces, to make sure only people with valid tags are parked there.

“This increase in illegally parked vehicles accessible parking is unacceptable,” said Sheriff Howard. “Today I am ordering my Deputies to increase their patrols of parking lots and ticket any vehicle without the proper permit or plate to park in these designated spaces. We are trying to raise the awareness of this activity, but if people choose to ignore our warnings, they will receive a ticket.”

By state law, towns and villages must tack on an additional \$30 surcharge on all traffic tickets for people that illegally park in handicapped spots. One half of that surcharge, \$15, must be given to Erie County to fund handicapped parking education programs. The other half of that surcharge is given back to the respective town or village where the ticket is given. The towns and villages are to use that money to fund criminal justice programs, including a disability awareness program for law enforcement agencies. Revenue for that surcharge is up 36 percent in the first quarter of 2018 compared to the same point in time last year.

“As someone who was confined to a wheelchair for six months as the result of an accident, I personally understand how important handicapped parking spots are to those in need. Please respect the law and leave the handicapped spots for the disabled,” said Dr. Patrick J. Keem, Orchard Park Town Supervisor.

“The sad truth is that handicapped parking violations consistently occur not only in the Town of Orchard Park but everywhere. This concerning violation is an issue and the violators impact so many. My department is focused on identifying offenders, however we have several shopping areas, public buildings, medical facilities, etc. where these offenses can occur and it is not possible to be everywhere all the time. I strongly urge the public to think before they park, but we are looking for violators and we will ensure you are ticketed for your egregious offense,” said Chief Pacholec.

The report from the Office of Erie County Comptroller shows the county of Erie is very close to what is actually being received from handicapped parking fines so far in 2018 compared to what was budgeted. According to the 2018 Erie County budget, approximately \$27,500 was budgeted as revenue from handicapped surcharge revenues.

For the first quarter of this year, Erie County received approximately \$6,567 in revenue from those fees. Multiplied by four quarters of the year, the projected revenue for 2018 is \$26,268. This number could increase or decrease depending on how many tickets are written for the remainder of the year.

“This important funding goes into an account that is used by the Office for People with Disabilities for a handicapped parking education program. The purpose of the program is to provide education, advocacy and increase awareness of handicapped parking laws,” concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

The “Report on Revenue from Town and Village Courts for Erie County Programs,” outlined not only Erie County’s portion of revenue from handicapped parking, but also looked at DWI fines and bail fees. It then compared actual numbers to budget projections.

- The report also showed that 35 percent of DWI fines are used for a campaign to inform the public about the risks of DWI, supervise chronic offenders through probation, investigate DWI crashes, encourage strict prosecution of DWI cases, and supplies DWI Victim Services. On average, Erie County budgets \$1.3 million for this program.
- The bail fees collected by Erie County are used for alternatives to incarceration programs. In the first quarter of 2018, Erie County collected \$2,013. This total is down 18.3 percent from first quarter of last year.
- Our Audit Division recommends careful monitoring of the budgets for these programs as revenue has dropped for DWI fines and bail fees. Although not a negative within itself as it suggests that less DWIs may be occurring, adjustments to the budget may be necessary in order to ensure that the programs remain within the constraints of the 2018 budget.

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